

The Role of the Principal in Relation to the
Successful Integration of
Computer Based Learning (CBL) in Schools

by

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis is written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Deepthi', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Deepthi Wijesekera

31 August 2008

*To my precious Ammi and Thathi... for the immense love and joy you brought
to my life*

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Abstract

Despite the considerable investment in computers in schools, there is little evidence that the expenditure has led to widespread changes in either pedagogy or student outcomes. The paucity of evidence of real change has been attributed to: (a) access to computers being regarded as an end in itself; (b) inadequate change processes in regards to incorporating computer based technologies (CBTs) in schools; (c) a lack of leadership and administrative support in relation to CBTs; and (d) poor understanding of leadership challenges associated with CBTs.

There is a sustained theme in the educational administration literature that the school principal's role is critical in the successful integration of CBTs in schools. Principals face many leadership challenges both administrative and conceptual in relation to CBTs. Yet, the CBT leadership of principals remains a topic that is not frequently considered when theorists or practitioners discuss the outcomes of computer based learning (CBL) as opposed to its implementation.

This study investigated the role of principals in four schools that were regarded as effectively utilising CBTs in teaching and learning. A case study approach was employed to explore what the principals specifically did to promote not only the integration, but importantly, the effective use of CBTs in these schools. Semi-structured interviews with the four principals combined with general observations of the school and analysis of selected school documents allowed examination of the ideas, pedagogies, and actions of the principals related to CBTs. In addition, semi-structured interviews with selected staff members who incorporated CBTs and innovative use of computers in their teaching and a school-administered survey with students were conducted to explore how such ideas and actions of the principal were understood by other members in the school community.

From the data gathered, the philosophy the school principals adopted in their schools to manage the process of CBL and specific pedagogies they led related to teaching and learning with CBTs were analysed. The specific approaches and

behaviours the principals displayed in relation to resources, staff, students, parents and school policies were also taken into consideration in developing an understanding of successful CBT leadership in the four schools.

The analysis of the data from the detailed case studies provided an interesting combination of leadership strategies of the principals. The analysis informed the development of a leadership model named “Strategic CBT Leadership”. This model comprises three inter-related frames: Strategic Vision, Practical Philosophy and Specific Pedagogies.

Fifteen recommendations for practice and two recommendations for further research are offered.